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From the President's Desk

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From the President's Desk

This letter appears in the Fall 2009 issue of the Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine

This August we welcomed to campus 555 first-year students from 22 states and 12 countries around the globe. The kick-off for the University's newest students was our traditional

New Student Convocation, where faculty and administrators greeted the class of 2013 as well as 29 transfer students. This convocation was part of Turning Titan orientation week activities, designed to acclimate incoming first-year students to academic, residential and social aspects of college life.

A key part of Titan Orientation is our Summer Reading Program, in which first-year students join faculty and staff in small-group discussions of a topical book that students are asked to read prior to arriving on campus. The program's goal is to introduce students to academic life at the University through discussion of a literary work that explores important issues related to one of our institutional goals. The reading program culminates in mid-September when the selected book's author comes to campus to deliver a lecture at the President's Convocation.

This year's reading selection was *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time*, the *New York Times* bestseller co-authored by Greg Mortenson and journalist David Oliver Relin.

Three Cups of Tea chronicles Mortenson's journey from a failed 1993 attempt to climb Pakistan's K2, the world's second highest mountain, to founding the Central Asia Institute, through which he has established 130 schools in some of the most remote and troubled regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We were delighted to welcome Greg Mortenson as our convocation speaker and gratified by the interest his visit generated both on campus and in the Bloomington-Normal community.

There are many lessons one might draw from Greg Mortenson's Herculean efforts, but I keep coming back to the idea that one person can make a difference in the lives of others, even under exceptionally difficult circumstances. This is a very important message for college students.

Since its inception four years ago, the Summer Reading Program has become a vital element of the curriculum, providing an added dimension to our distinctive role as a liberal arts university. At the outset, it reinforces the importance of critical thinking and effective communication skills. The discussions and lecture also expose students to a diversity of ideas and stimulate further reading and exploration. Finally, we have found that the discussions enhance the feeling among faculty, staff and alumni that education is a shared responsibility.

During this fall's New Student Convocation, I spoke to Illinois Wesleyan's newest class about the importance of our motto, "Scientia et Sapientia" ("Knowledge and Wisdom"). The motto speaks to a long-held belief that our students are here to do more than simply learn facts and information - they are also here to learn how to use that knowledge wisely and for the benefit of others. I am

pleased to see that our Summer Reading Program speaks to the heart of that motto and the educational mission behind it.

Richard E. Wilson